

Altaring Archives

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m o F u t u r e s

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Open Archief 4 / 2026

REMEMBER

Remembering

remembrance

de eerste zwarte prostitutie op de Amsterdamse Wallen

POTTEN EN FLIKKERDAG

- HET BESTRIJDEN VAN RACISME; -----

Travestie alleen voor vrouwen ...

... doelgericht, ongegeneerd en bezitterig ...

de grenzen  
nooit  
poldicht

EENHEID en SOLIDARITEIT

STIL = DOOD  
ZWYGEN = ZWYGEN

lesbische en sadomasochistische seksuele bevrijding.

De stille strijd der transseksuelen

homodiscotheek,

RACIST POLICE, RACIST STATE!

zwart aan zet

Als groep sta je meestal sterker.

claiming an identity.

Homofielen  
zijn echt zo  
anders niet

flamboyant

VOGUE-AWARD

En Wat Dan Noq

een self-made women

SAFE & SEX & TOYS (fun)

overleving van de dubbel verachte  
minderheid — zwart en homosek-  
sueel. Met gevoel voor ironie.

"extrayagante baby"

Voguing in de Roxy,

Transseksueel meestal  
tevreden na operatie

LOVE SAFELY

ENOUGH DIVISION —  
BABYLON THE ENEMY.

FOR ALL QUEERS

strijdt  
tegen  
staats-  
fascisme

WE ARE WOMEN, WE ARE  
BLACK, WE ARE DYKES TO  
WATCH OUT FOR

alle regels overtreden  
en alle grenzen  
doorbroken worden!

ZELF (HULP)-ORGANISATIE VOOR ALLOCHTONE HOMOSEXUELE JONGEREN.

"Glad to be gay, toch?"

"Loving to be lesbian, toch?"

BLACK LESBIANS & GAYS  
FIGHT BACK!

FOR MY OWN PROTECTION

dat ik spiritueel gesproken een vrouw ben.

Het levensverhaal van een zwarte lesbienne

het transseksuele fenomeen

aids-benefiet met als thema 'Dress dan-  
gerous, act wild, but keep it safe'.

THE LIVES OF BLACK MEN  
ARE PRICELESS  
AND CAN BE SAVED.

VOOR ALLOCHTONE MAN-VROUW  
EN VROUW-MAN TRANSSEKSUELEN

Zo willen gezien worden, bewonderd, móét gevonden worden.

Group SEX is always  
Safer with Condoms.

Het is er ook in de droom.

I WAS NOT ALONE

LET THERE BE CHANGES.



*Experiencing this Present, which is already (a) Past, yet has been a future for far longer...*

# Welcome

I have embarked on a search for how to become Free and am finding answers inside, outside, in spite of, around and beyond material archives. I am learning from past movements, organisations and individuals; searching for stories of those who fought for their rights in order to recognise, honour and continue these struggles for Freedom, which were started far before i was born, before the turn of this millennium.

This (re)search into dutch, black, queer & trans histories of resistance and survival is shaped by intergenerational conversations i have been blessed to have with activists and artists anne krul, Priscilla van Opstal and Frank Wijdenbosch. As well as the knowledge and archives left behind by Charl Landvreugd, Fidel Fields Couvertier, Edwin Gassama and Nicolina Geesink Sant. Their personal archives, both material and of experience laid the groundwork for this project. I am full of Love for each and every one of them and immensely Grateful to get to share, revere, and remember their stories.

One thing i've learned is that our pasts are so much more full than the dominant archives ever dare to show us. The authority of archives has made it seem like our histories don't exist, like i wouldn't be able to find important resemblances of self in documentation of the last century. And it's partially true - a lot of physical archival material has been lost because people had to move often, did not have access to proper archival storages or because no one was there to treasure the materials after they died. A lot of photos have been ruined by the weather, videotapes destroyed by dust, other materials lost after being lent out to people and institutions. Yet so much has survived. *We have not even scratched the surface of our Black queer stories and narratives in Europe through its artistic, cultural, and archival production.*<sup>1</sup> The remaining materials are often hidden in boxes, invisible to most, but they're here.

A lot of it is not yet digitised, waiting in archival institutions with limited capacities and not enough budget for our stories, which are falsely classified as unimportant. But parts are coming up into the light, Thanks

- 1 Gianmaria Colpani, Wigbertson Julian Isenia, and Naomie Pieter - Archiving queer of colour politics in the Netherlands (2019)
- 2 Noelle Deleon - Community Documentation and Archiving In Ballroom (2024)
- 3 Matt Richardson - The Queer Limit Of Black Memory (2013)
- 4 Chimira Natanna Obiefule - Process and Practice: Art as a Freedom Choreography (2024)
- 5 Charl Landvreugd - Notes on Imagining Afropea (2016)

to the work of the archivists that understand this necessity, as *to archive is to give the past a voice, and to give the present & future a glimpse into their lineage. It's a chance to carry, showcase and tell the stories of those who are no longer here, and those who will eventually arrive in this place.*<sup>2</sup>

Documentation of black queer life in europe exists not only in physical documentations, but in our Memory as well. There are many storytellers still alive. Griots, poets, people with a lot to say. The archives of experience are endless. *Black queer people find creative ways to remember each other and to grieve for ourselves when others do not. In our grief we create an ever-expanding archive of Black queer innovations in Black experience, resistance, and self-making.*<sup>3</sup>

This search for resemblance of self... of black, queer, trans, resistance in the dutch archive comes from a place of deep grief,,, *grief in not seeing oneself or; seeing oneself only from a specific place of subjugation*<sup>4</sup>. Even tho i didn't need evidence to know deeply that there have always been people that share my position, wishes and Dreams - i still often wished that i could name Ancestors that shared this land and lived, looked, Loved like me. I was a very hopeless teenager. Growing up without any (historical) mirrors made it so that for the majority of my life, envisioning a future in which i was alive felt like an impossible endeavour. Dreaming truly felt like an arduous task, whereas nightmares came so easy.

The netherlands likes to play pretend and make it seem like it's an open-minded country but anyone living waywardly on the margins of this society knows that it's a pretence. *This is a society where historically, tolerance for others tends to take priority over actual full acceptance*<sup>5</sup>. Yes, there are levels of safety possible here that make me feel blessed to get to experience this place, but it is only truly safe here for people that exist in submission to dutch supremacy. This country is constructed up out of its violent embraces of racism, fascism, capitalism, neocolonialism, policing, bureaucracy, hierarchies, enforced poverty, blackface. It is made to

- 6 senakirfa A., at Vocal Opacities (2024)
- 7 Malidoma Patrice Somé - The Healing Wisdom of Africa (1998)
- 8 Jessica de Abreu - Archiving the Superpowers of Black Sex Workers, from: Open Archief (2024)

continue to exist because of its horrific border policies, ecoterrorism, prisons, politicians, landlords, bootlickers, cop fuckers... Please do not get me wrong, even though this research centres this country, it truly is FUCK that red white and blue, *fuck the netherlands and their tolerancy too*<sup>6</sup>.

Some therapists have tried to make me believe that as long as i myself am happy, the grief of living in a world like this won't feel so heavy, but this is a type of individuality i cannot find peace in. I deeeeeeply know and feel that everything is connected, the land, nature, people, you, me, we - so if one aspect of this sacred dance is hurting, it bleeds into everything. This project has to concern itself with the motion of theory into practice. Exploring how cultural and creative movements fit together with Freedom movements through forms of art, direct actions and resistance. How we can learn from the ways that radical black queerness shows and does not show up in the dutch cultural archives.



- 9 Rasheeda Philips - Black Quantum Futurism (2020)
- 10 Tina Campt - Listening to images (2017)
- 11 Juliana Huxtable - Indigence (2025)
- 12 Toni Morrison - Beloved (1987)

How we can take our big words into the streets in order to make big moves, making the active choice to contribute to Liberation movements not just by consciousness work, but by acting as revolutionaries in the material aspects as well. As this land/country/continent tries to stifle any attempts to live Free. They lock us up for being against the supremacist regime, for standing up to police, for finding a place to live, for embracing our crazy, for not having the 'right' papers, for practicing our sexualities. All punished with involuntary admissions, prison sentences - punished with (social) deaths. If they would open up (the files) i know i'd find reflections of self in the (archive of a) psych ward, in the (archive of a) prison, in the (archive of a) cemetery.

I am in search of Freedom but a european north star would lead us further into enemy territory. A mirage of Liberation. I am conflicted. I am complicit. I make my own constellations. \* \*\*\*\*\* \*\* \*\* \*\*\*\*\*. I cry tears and tears and tears over people i've never met, never will. I have lost my mind so many times, they've called me crazy in more ways i could count. But now i embrace my craze, as i am the boss of my own brain :^)

Anyways. Deep breath in.

I try to let the grief manifest itself in my art, writing and Prayers. *As denied an outward expression, grief grows stronger and organises itself like a hurricane that can rise up and sweep us away*<sup>7</sup>. I need to allow feelings and emotions to take up more space than my rationality and ability for intellectualization. I must write less from the head and more from the heart<sup>8</sup>. So i embrace that (t)here is a terrible beauty that can come from sorrow and pain.

I follow my feelings and honour my intuition, letting them guide me into new worlds. I fantasise around the available archival documentation and *collapse these various time-spaces into themselves*<sup>9</sup>. I am seeing life beyond the records, *listening to images*<sup>10</sup>, becoming a conduit for Spirit. *Spinning theories out of circumstance*<sup>11</sup>, nothing too far fetched, it's like *when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else*<sup>12</sup>.

- 13 Saidiya Hartman - Venus In Two Acts (2008)
- 14 Arthur Jafa - bell hooks and Arthur Jafa Discuss Transgression in Public Spaces (2014)
- 15 Dirg Aaab-Richards - In Pensive Mood (1987)

- 16 Jackie Kay - Trumpet (1998)
- 17 Niven Govinden - This Brutal House (2019)
- 18 C. Riley Snorton - Black On Both Sides (2017)
- 19 Melz Owusu - Undisciplined: Reclaiming the Right to Imagine (2024)



The Dream archives help me find that which doesn't yet exist in a material world, i imagine what could have been<sup>13</sup>, seeing those who were there already - if only by fantasy. The only way I can express my reality is through fiction, because it is so unbelievable.<sup>14</sup> My mind has to rewrite / what isn't there but was.<sup>15</sup> Make it up and trace it back.<sup>16</sup> Imagination filling in gaps.<sup>17</sup>

Practicing black and queer methodologies of working with archives and Memory in a form of countermythography comes with a LEGACY of creators, writers, artists who needed to *dissolve the distinction between 'actual life' and 'posthumous life' in a process of gathering and organizing the scattered fragments of the past to meet the needs of the present*.<sup>18</sup> My needs for seeing myself and my communities reflected in lives before my arrival on this Earth haven't been met in enough material archives, which is why i choose to turn to these rememories, sacred (day) Dreams and the act of Altaring, a word brought to me by Chimira Natanna Obiefule, which i choose to define as;

**Altaring;** to change, modify, make different, offerings, sacrifices, religious rites... through ritual (intentional, spiritual, sacred acts) >>> into an altar (holy, worshipped, divine space).

This is what Melz Owusu calls trans epistemology: *To sculpt and craft a space of possibility on a blackened canvas of immovable scientific 'fact' / into an alternative way of coming to know altogether / Creating from absolute nothingness / to work with the recognition that we must create a new being, a new world, new language and names, bodies that would have otherwise never existed without the commitment to dreaming / Moving beyond that which can be known through the looking eye; it is about connecting with a level of reality that is not perceptible through the material of scientific lens, it is about transformation beyond what the logical mind can comprehend, it is about indulging in wondrous rule-breaking possibility*.<sup>19</sup> An exploration of what has historically been deemed 'fiction' into 'theory'. 'Dreams' into 'reality'. Undoing epistemic hierarchies.

I Love you Melz for giving me the language and knowledge of being Undisciplined. I Thank you for guiding me through this exploration every step of the way.

Many ghost writers to thank for this work, i am indebted to those named and unnamed.



*We begraven zelf onze doden. Wij kunnen ze ook zelf in leven houden. Alles wat we bedenken komt tot leven. Alles wat ons gewoel blijft leven. Alles wat een harts heest in ons gewoel heest in ons gewoel.*

*20 Astrid Roemer - Over De Geite Van Een Vrouw (1982)*

WELCOME ..... 3

INSIDE ..... 9

OUTSIDE ..... 19

BEYOND ..... 25

IN SPITE OF ..... 31

AROUND ..... 37

OUTRO ..... 41

SOURCES ..... 43



Flyer *We are women, we are black, we are dykes to watch out for...* by Strange Fruit Vrouwen, for a program hosted at COC, Amsterdam, 1995. Source: Archive Anne Krul, folder 20, Collection of the International Archive for the Women's Movement (IAV), Amsterdam: Atria, Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History

# Inside

It is september 10<sup>th</sup> 2024 and i just arrived slightly late to a panel talk about the new book (Re)claiming. anne krul and Tieneke Sumter are two of the people on stage, talking about language, self definition, chosen names. anne reads the text of a flyer from 1995, which shows a year overview of meetings for ZAMIS, TORTILLAS, LESBICAS, SEVICILER, VROUWEN DIE VAN VROUWEN HOUDEN, MARIMACHAS, TOMBOYS, LADY BUTCHES AND ALL THE OTHER WOMEN, PRINCESSES, QUEENS & QUEERS, MOMS AND DAUGHTERS, FEMMES - POOR, RICH, SHY OR BITCHY, AFRICAN-DECENDED, ASIAN-DECENDED BUT O F C O L O R.<sup>21</sup> I approach them after the talk, express my Gratitude and get my copy of the book signed. anne signs it:

Keep up the spirit!  
anne @

anne was born in 1958, is a *mengelmoes* of dutch and Ghanaian descent and was adopted by a dutch catholic family. She mostly identifies as a *pot* (dyke), not often as a lesbian, as that feels too bourgeois. They are androgynous and sometimes refer to themselves as non-binary because it's easier, but she's still attached to her original names. anne is neurodivergent and has been active in alternative care, women's care and various Liberation movements. One of their core values is peer learning; each one teach one.

In an interview for the *Roze Reuzen* podcast, anne shares that growing up she was seen as tall for her age, had a big mouth and from the age twelve or even younger she was often resisting against racism directed her way. She'd kick and hit people that tried to belittle or offend her and was honoured when people said she acted like a boy. Her spirited energy, fight for justice and need for new worlds help her navigate her involvement with different radical advocacy movements.

One of their first moments of activism was in the late 70s when they were part of a group that was going against the Youth For Christ,

- 21 Gianmaria Colpani and Wigbertson Julian Isenia - *Strange Fruits: Queer of Color Intellectual Labor in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s*, from: *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe* (2018)
- 22 Tabea Nixdorff & Noah Littel - (Re)claiming, from: *Archival Textures* (2024)



as the organisation was spouting homophobic beliefs and directing people into conversion therapies. The action group had interventions in different ways; they were dissecting the networks, bringing flyers that say "*Jezus houdt ook van homoseksuelen*" ["Jesus also loves homosexuals"] into their gatherings and allegedly they once painted the Youth For Christ building pink.

anne continued to be part of different movements, such as the *Gekken beweging* [Mad movement] which was a fight against psychiatry, as the stigmas on diagnoses and the overall lack of rights for neurodivergent people made them lose ownership over their own minds. On top of that many people were deemed 'unfit for society' or 'crazy' based on their (trans)sexualities, which in turn made psychiatric systems incorrectly medicate them or lock them up in wards where they had no Freedoms.

anne was also active in the general *potten en flikkers beweging* (dykes and faggots movement), fighting to create more human rights, safe and affordable housing, recognition, opportunities, safety and emancipation. They believed in the importance and necessity of real solidarity, but longed to truly connect with people where they felt they could fully exist. There was a level of disappointment with the white movements, an anger about feeling this inability to show up as their whole self. *It was a sequence of antagonisms in the anti-colonial and feminist movements that led to the emergence of intersectional organizing.*<sup>22</sup> They found a new home in movements that cen-

- 23 Audre Lorde – Sister Love: The Letters of Audre Lorde and Pat Parker (2018)
- 24 Esther Captain and Halleh Ghorashi – Tot behoud van mijn identiteit, from: Caleidoscopische Visies, Translation mine (2001)

- 25 Audre Lorde – Learning from the 60s, from: Sister Outsider (1982)
- 26 Gianmaria Colpani, Wigbertson Julian Isenia, and Naomie Pieter – Archiving queer of colour politics in the Netherlands (2019)
- 27 A Tale Of A Tub – Anagramma Tics (2025)

tred the black women's fights. A fight they had always been able to analyse, but theory can only do so much when what you truly desire is connections, friendships and actions. She joined amongst others the activities of ZAMI, Sister Outsider and Flamboyant, coming together with black women of different generations, backgrounds and lifestyles. anne has been challenged and embraced by so many Black women from the ZMV movement, Zwarte, migranten- en vluchtelingen-vrouwen beweging [Black, migrant and refugee women's movement]<sup>23</sup>.

This movement worked to organise events with shared goals, such as *Zwarte vrouwenvriendschappen dag*, a day dedicated to black women's friendships. They were active in international movements, corresponding, exchanging and fundraising with South African feminists in their fights against apartheid, as well as learning with and from various other black women's movements across europe, such as in germany and london. *Those Afro-European women are coming on, do you hear me? The sisters are coming on.*<sup>24</sup>

The commentary of black feminists from the us has been of great importance in formulating alternative identities in the Netherlands. The term 'zwarte vrouwen' [black women] was introduced in the 80s, under influence of the black-consciousness movement, black feminism, black studies and womanism – however, in the Netherlands it wasn't that obvious who would fit under the denominator 'black'.<sup>25</sup> The group classification 'black' at the time was used as an umbrella term for everyone that is not white. It signified an intersectional, global perspective – it was used as a political term that showed the necessary solidarities in common struggles fought by people of former dutch colonies, refugees and ethnic minorities.

Self definition is a political act, *if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for*



me and eaten alive<sup>26</sup>. The process of defining yourself and your surroundings comes with many questions. *I think as black and other people of colour we face different challenges. Do you want to reveal and signal your ethnic background? Do you use the words that your parents used for your ethnicity? Would you like to claim your background and also in a political way?*<sup>27</sup> When discussing the past, should we use the terms used at the time? These questions of categorisation become even more apparent when they are part of an institutional dialogue, such as when working with formal organisations, public broadcasting or within an archive. anne krul has chosen to house parts of their collection at public archives, which means that there is the necessary task of putting linguistic and categorical borders onto all the materials, in order to enclose them properly within the institutions. For someone like anne who is active on so many different intersections – working towards the goal of Liberation, not just around one specific identity – it can be hard to fit yourself and your histories within one specific framework.

For example; an archive like Atria (Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History) was made especially for feminist histories, so when anne would bring in artefacts that were made in all gender spaces, the archive often would not want to house it. Similarly when they were bringing materials into ILHIA (International Gay/Lesbian Information Centrum and Archive), they would have to frame certain aspects of leftist organizing in a way that would make it fit into the context of the archive. These facets of having to find the right space, properly categorising everything, carefully handling the materials and letting go emotionally make the act of archiving a lengthy process. On top of that, archival institutions are often working with limited budgets, cutbacks and scarcity, especially when they are concerned with the legacies of people pushed to the margins.



anne krul is currently in the process of bringing more and more of their materials into ILHIA, but ILHIA doesn't have the physical space to house everything, so then things have to be moved to IISH (International Institute of Social History). anne wants to make sure that their collections are archived in ways that invite re-use and critical reflection, often thinking of ways to activate the archive. They have generously contributed their archival materials to books, articles, exhibitions and workshops – in order for the material to stay alive.

What is contained within anne krul's living collection is an immense amount of materials showing their art practice, flyers and posters of various radically leftist movements, international solidarities, memorabilia of

black queer life. They kept notes and minutes about actions created by different organisations, for a part out of pride, but also to use as examples for future efforts. In their decision making process they chose to first focus on archiving all the collective work, so that not only her history and efforts would be preserved, but the efforts of those around her as well. Seeing how much resistance, visibility, policy-making and organizing happened in the decades before i was born has given me a whole new Love for those who worked to make this world what it currently is. I truly owe my life to so many fighters and i am overflowing with Gratitude for the fact. I deeply cherish, worship, venerate those who came before.

I am so immensely Grateful to get to experience the wealth that lives inside of anne's

28 Gianmaria Colpani and Wigbertson Julian Isenia  
 - Strange Fruits: Queer of Color Intellectual Labor  
 in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s, from:  
 Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe (2018)



archive, not just the material but in her unending source of reMemories as well. Any flyer, photo, poem i have a question about will be answered with such vivid stories, Love for the Memory and an ability to connect the past into the present. In our conversations there is a constant line being drawn between the similarities in black queer existence then and now. One large thread is how our lives will always be entangled with international solidarity movements; how decades ago they were boycotting the white South African occupation, student movements were taking to the streets for the Liberation of West-Papua, Kanaky, Palestine, houses were being squatted in order to give undocumented people a place to live. All efforts that are currently still a necessity.

Throughout these many years of organizing, and in the spirit of working with art and poetry as a tool for change, krul was also always working away on her solo artistic practice.<sup>28</sup> anne is an activist, organiser and archivist - yes, and simultaneously she is a visual artist, poet and writer that manages to combine all of these fragments into a magnificent practice spanning painting, video collage, slide installations, sculpture, audio works and anagram poetry. They know of the power of performance, how to activate space in different ways, they know of the potent powers of art and creation, not only wanting to highlight the structures they oppose, but creating worlds in which they show what they stand for as well. Creating from a curious place that wonders; what has been hidden? What do i want to show? What could the future look like?

What Dreams can be shared?

I owe so much of my capacity for imagining histories to their practice, there are so many different timelines i got to fly into and Dream around. It is very clear that the entire archive is Loved by them. anne truly reaffirmed in me the belief that archival practices are a worthy effort, that there is immense value in keeping, preserving and sharing our stories. That this Love for our histories is a wonderful thing.

Anne is one of the people that allowed me to move the boundaries of my desires, it is through them that i started Dreaming of so much more than i ever dared to before. Truly, they're a dyke to watch out for.



ARCHIVING QUEER OF COLOUR POLITICS IN THE NETHERLANDS



Figure 4 Members of Strange Fruit. Standing in the back from left to right: Andy Garton, Marlon Reina, Reggie Williams, and Jerry Haimé. Sitting in front from left to right: Anne Krul, Gilbert-Jean Francourt, Oebele Kooistra, and Andre Reeder (1997).

Source: personal archive of Jerry Haimé.



29 Fatima El-Tayeb – *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (2011)



On a fateful day anne was working with kindred spirit and lifelong partner in crime Sook Ahn to create a three day multicultural festival as a fundraiser for the Asian Lesbian Congress in 1990, held in Bangkok, Thailand. They were working at the COC amsterdam (the oldest known surviving LGBTQIA+ advocacy organization), when they heard steel drums coming from somewhere else in the building, something that was very unlikely to happen in the white, dutch space of COC. Anne and Sook followed the magical sounds and walked into the very first evening held by a new collective; Strange Fruit. A collective *founded by a group of queer youths of Muslim and Afro-Caribbean background, for the most part welfare recipients and sex workers, who came together intending to challenge their marginalisation within both their ethnic communities and the Dutch gay scene. Committed to a self-help approach, the group offered an insider's perspective to other queer youths of colour; rather than that of aid workers delivering "expert knowledge," it used the expertise present within the community itself.*<sup>29</sup>

30 Gianmaria Colpani and Wigbertson Julian Isenia – *Strange Fruits: Queer of Color Intellectual Labor in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s*, from: *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe* (2018)

The collective was founded by a group of friends out of the need to make things better for themselves and others. They created spaces where they could find a feeling of home and come to rest, a space where they wouldn't be forced to talk or explain yourself, you would just be welcomed as you are. A concrete utopia. At Strange Fruit events there were tables with flyers, brochures and business cards that were found or created by the collective. These gave information about where people could find comrades, within and outside of their ethnic communities. This is where you could find information about safer sex, asylum procedures, hormones, surgeries, religion, spirituality and more.

There was a lot of wisdom shared within the group from one to another, with a central point being the roundtable meetings. During these evenings it was a place to socialise and strategise, where people would share about their actions and get feedback, as well as receive personal advice about how to survive without things like money, papers or safety. They discussed among other things, strategies for how to deal with extortion in gay entertainment spaces, the inhumane treatments of the IND (Immigration and Naturalisation "Service") or how to get out of a relationship with an abusive sugar daddy. This space of vulnerable dialogue and non-hierarchical sharing is where they were able to organise different actions, in many forms. *Strange Fruit embraced culture in its broadest sense, integrating the cultural background of its members – religion, language, vernacular culture, and so forth – as a core aspect of its approach to homophobia and racism, sex work, and HIV/AIDS, among other issues.*<sup>30</sup> The collective deeply understood and respected the political impact of coming together, creation and Freedom Dreaming.

They found creative ways around useless and harmful legalities. For example, many refugees weren't allowed to work and most institutions weren't flexible enough to make it possible to pay them, so Strange Fruit members with dutch passports would use their bank accounts to receive money for others. There was a lot of fundraising and mutual aid, there

31 Gianmaria Colpani and Wigbertson Julian Isenia – *Strange Fruits: Queer of Color Intellectual Labor in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s*, from: *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe* (2018)



were different instances of sharing residency addresses and various lavender and "sham" marriages for people to satisfy their families or get their paperwork in order.

The group was active for twelve years, but they were continuously worked against by ignorance and people who weren't able to hear or see new possibilities. The government saw the fact that many of the members were sex workers as a massive problem, rather than another way to live. There was no effort to build antiracist structures in any of the policy making and at some point it all became too much. Strange Fruit decided to break out of the COC when it became more clear that their *commitment to a horizontal self-help approach, and its determination to challenge both heteropatriarchy in communities of color and the whiteness of the LGBT scene, came to clash with COC's goals and methods.*<sup>31</sup> Still, their existence has

gifted us a legacy, a place to pull strength from, a generous source of inspiration for how to organize, how to live in community, how to contribute to a future.

The Revolutionary effort of this collective is something i treasure dearly. The fights and sacrifices made by the members has lead to a world in which there is more knowledge about what it means to come together as queer people of colour in the netherlands, so we don't have to figure it all out from scratch, we have shoulders to lean on.

"Glad to be gay, toch?"

"Loving to be lesbian, toch?"

Of denk je hier anders over?

Ben je van zwarte of etnische afkomst dan is er voor jou een organisatie waarin je hierover je verhaal kwijt kunt.

Stel je een theater voor, en jij staat op dat podium.

Wat wil je dan gaan spelen en bereiken? Juist een plek voor jezelf, een huis, een baan, fun, en ga zo maar door.

Stel je op dat podium een of andere 'gang' voor, en geef die nou het naampje Strange Fruit.

Als je het wat lijkt om te bepalen wat die gang gaat doen, voor de groep en voor jezelf, lees dan verder.

#### ZELFHULPORGANISATIE

Strange Fruit is een zwarte / migranten - zelfhulp, organisatie, voor jongens die van jongens houden en meiden die van meiden houden. Wij willen een plek voor onszelf, en eigen activiteiten. Eén keer per maand hebben wij een swingende café-avond waar je andere jongeren kunt ontmoeten, die ongeveer in dezelfde positie zitten.

Door anderen te helpen, kun je leren jezelf te helpen. Soms betekent dit samen zoeken naar een huis, werk, plezier, vrienden, en ga zo maar door. Jij bepaalt wat er gebeurt, en hoe het gebeurt!

#### MULTI-CULTUREEL

Bovendien zijn we een multi-culturele organisatie. Dat betekent dat er binnen Strange Fruit veel culturen zijn vertegenwoordigd. Dit geeft een rijk geheel, en geeft ook mogelijkheden om samen sterk te staan in een nederlandse samenleving, waar jongeren zoals wij vaak weinig kansen hebben. De verschillende culturen waar ieder van ons uit komt, zijn rijke en bijzondere culturen en iets om trots op te zijn. Dat willen we als Strange Fruit uitdragen naar de buitenwereld. Strange Fruit geeft je de ruimte om op je eigen manier om te gaan met je gevoelens voor jongens en voor meiden.

#### WAT DOET STRANGE FRUIT?

Jongeren die nu binnen Strange Fruit actief zijn, hebben de volgende activiteiten opgezet.

#### CAFÉ-AVONDEN

Strange Fruit organiseert elke derde dinsdag van de maand besloten ontmoetingsavonden met disco, muziek uit de eigen culturen, een hapje en een drankje. Tevens kun je hier een eigen optreden verzorgen, en nodigen wij ook vaak groepen uit voor een optreden. Zoals een zwarte lesbische vrouwenband. Ook kun je in ons programma vinden: een arabische sprookjesverteller, en natuurlijk films en lezingen van zwarte, arabische en turkse filmmakers en schrijvers/-schrijfsters. Heb je zin om achter de bar te staan, meld je dan bij onze bargroep. Naast de café-avonden organiseren wij ook regelmatig feesten. Hiervoor moet je bij de feestcommissie zijn.

#### PERFORMANCE & ENTERTAINMENTGROEP

Binnen Strange Fruit is een Arabische buikdansgroep voor meisjes, vrouwen, jongens en mannen van Marokkaanse en Turkse afkomst. In deze groep geeft een professionele leraar dansles, en worden de dansen die zijn geleerd op de Strange Fruit café-avond in de vorm van een optreden getoond. Arabische dansen met een eigentijdse invulling waarmee hopelijk later betaalde optredens kunnen worden verzorgd. Ook zijn er plannen om een zanggroep op te richten. Black Power, real blues en moderne rhythms. De stem van Strange Fruit.

#### RADIO-GROEP

Een aantal mensen vanuit Strange Fruit verzorgen een maandelijks radioprogramma bij de Amsterdamse Gay and Lesbian radio MVS: 'Global Perspective'. Dit is een multi-cultureel programma met politieke, culturele, seksuele en persoonlijke onderwerpen. Wil je hieraan meewerken? Meld je bij de radiogroep. Het programma wordt elke vierde donderdag van de maand uitgezonden tussen 20.00 en 21.00 uur op de kabel 103,8 MHz en via de ether 106,8 MHz.

#### VROUWENGROEP

Binnen Strange Fruit zijn de vrouwen en meiden bezig een landelijk netwerk op te bouwen. Ook zijn er contacten en activiteiten met andere vrouwen- en meidenorganisaties. Hoewel iedereen bij Strange Fruit door elkaar heen loopt, willen vrouwen en meiden ook een eigen ruimte, zoals een Strange Fruit vrouwen-avond. Of je nu een self-made woman bent, een vrouw tussen twee culturen of een eigenwijze meid. De liefde voor elkaar is het belangrijkste wat telt. Als groep sta je meestal sterker.

#### ACTIE / SCHRIJF-GROEP

Als organisatie moet er veel gebeuren om de boel te laten draaien. Subsidie-aanvragen, financiën, evaluaties, maar ook reageren op beleidsontwikkelingen, artikelen met foutieve beelden over mensen zoals wij. Vertalingen, congressen, en ga zo maar door. Mensen met een scherpe geest, een vloeiende pen, een creatieve instelling en gouden handjes zijn nodig om een concrete utopie als Strange Fruit te laten bestaan. Heb je hier interesse voor? Laat dan wat van je horen.

#### PERSOONLIJKE PROBLEMEN

Voor opvang en steun kun je bij Strange Fruit altijd iemand aan zijn of haar mouw trekken. We proberen er voor elkaar te zijn. Dat is niet altijd even gemakkelijk. Maar wij gaan er vanuit dat twee meer weten dan één. Voor specifiek advies op het gebied van juridische problemen, vluchtelingen en hulpverlening kunnen we je doorverwijzen naar maatschappelijk hulpverleners bij Strange Fruit.

#### PLAATS

COC, Rozenstraat 14, 1016 NX Amsterdam.  
Tel. 020 - 626 30 87 / 623 40 79  
Café-avonden: 21.00 - 01.00 uur.

Wil je meewerken of nieuwe initiatieven ontplooiën, kom dan een keer langs op een café-avond of bel.

Ken je iemand die ook geïnteresseerd is in Strange Fruit? Geef deze folder dan door.



# Outside

32 Toni Morrison - Beloved (1987)

I am very blessed to have gotten to meet and connect with one of the founders and long-time members of Strange Fruit, Priscilla van Opstal also known as Cilla or Zilla(h). She currently lives in Rotterdam with her two babies, Flo and Lola. She has next to no on-line presence and i only managed to find and contact her because she did an interview with a local newspaper. Priscilla barely uses the internet, still has a landline and her social life is rich and varied.

She doesn't show up in public archives often, and when she does, it's not always with her full consent. There are multiple images of her that were taken and archived without her knowledge and name. Such as an image, taken during *Roze Zaterdag* in Zoetermeer, where Strange Fruit was invited to share their existence and experience as *allochtone homojongeren*. She appeared in multiple TV shows and has videotapes of various performances, but her videorecorder got stolen and the VCRs are hidden in one of the many boxes that haven't been unpacked since her move, so none of this is available for others to view, even though she does have a desire to be seen.

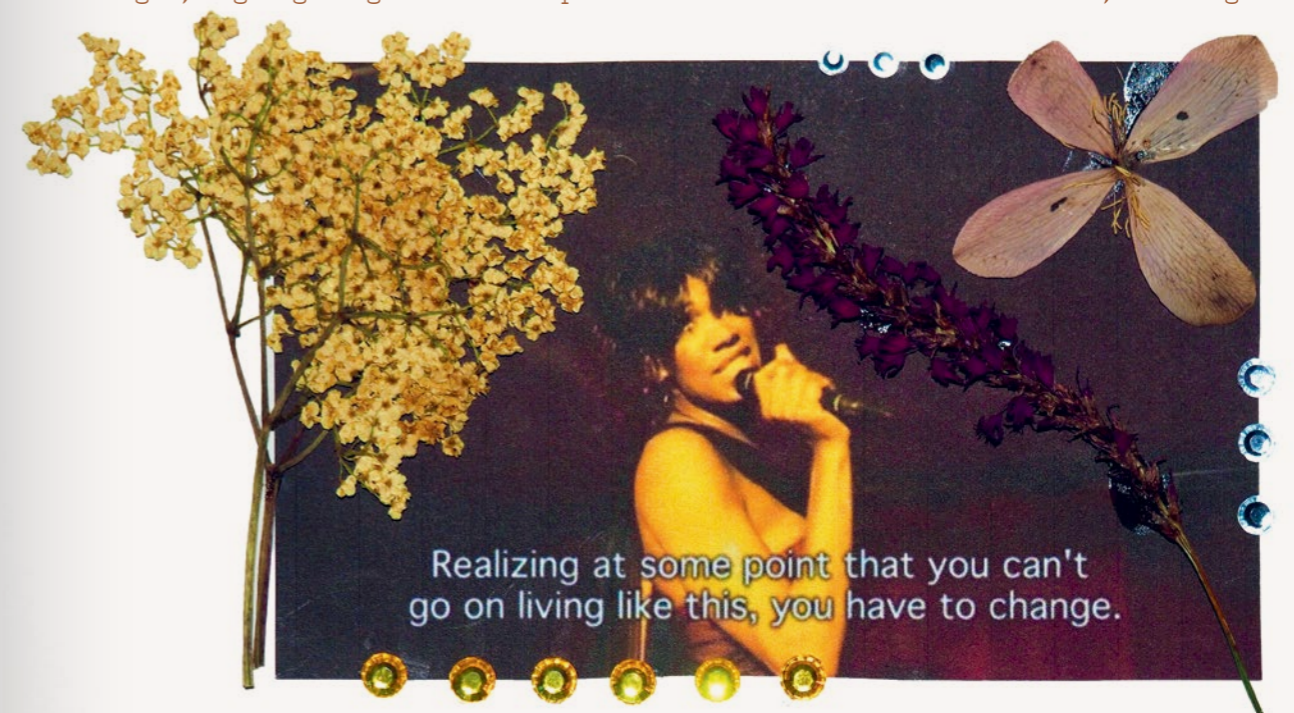
In 2012 she was approached to star in a documentary about her life, she said yes and to this day lives with a form of regret as the filmmaker tried to portray her in a negative light, highlighting her biased opinions

on Cilla's life. The director didn't ask for her input on the editing process, didn't pay her and didn't share that the film would be available to rent and buy online. She's still making money of her image to this day, while Priscilla has not even received a copy.

There is a silence in the public archive, while she has contributed so much to the fight for black trans life in the netherlands. Her perspective has been missing, only outside views on her life. The encounter with the archive is a confrontational thing for her. Rediscovering moments and people that come with a lot of complicated emotions, for a long time *remembering seemed unwise*<sup>32</sup>. But i'm grateful that Priscilla is now in a better place and i am immensely honoured to get to share more of her story in this way.

Priscilla was born in Suriname in 1966 and was adopted by dutch parents in the first few years of her life, she arrived in the netherlands at the age of five. There are a lot of questions around her birth family as her adoption didn't go through the general routes. It is one of the main reasons as to why she says she can't die yet, why she's still choosing to stay alive, so she can figure out where it is she comes from, unearth all the secrets around the adoption.

She was raised in Bavel, a village close to



- 33 Sobonfu E. Somé - The Spirit of Intimacy (1997)  
 34 Ada M. Patterson - a love that hesitates, a love that swims too far out (2021)



Breda in the south of the country. She'd always known herself as a woman but it wasn't until she moved to amsterdam in her early twenties that she could fully embrace the fact. It was the Strange Fruit collective that gave her the comfortability and confidence to give in to her deep longing feelings. Cilla started her transition relatively young, her father administered her first dose of Oestrogen in her early twenties, but she still wishes that she had listened to her intuitions and started earlier, so she could have enjoyed her life sooner, so she could have felt Free for longer.

Cilla's story spins between joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. She knows for sure that if she had been born in another place, another time, she could have easily been considered a witch and been hunted and burnt. Or she could have been honoured as a Gatekeeper, *the keepers of the keys to other dimensions*<sup>33</sup>, as she's well aware that trans people all around the world have been regarded as spiritual leaders. There are protective angels all around her. Very necessary, because her level of desirability can easily be a curse. She's had something beyond luck, because far too many girls she once knew have been murdered. Many of her stories end with deaths; the women that didn't survive Keileweg, people taking too many drugs in the club with the intent of dying right there and then, people sick with HIV/AIDS that were traveling back to Suriname in order to be buried in their homeland.

Yet Priscilla is somehow still alive. She's surviving. Surviving *the pain of losing starlight*<sup>34</sup>. Surviving a family that still doesn't embrace her in her fullness. Surviving a house she's never felt welcomed in as the neighbours couldn't accept that she was born different. Surviving a tumultuous youth, experiences with child sexual abuse. For the longest time she had nightmares about a baby coffin, felt that a little girl had died and started living inside her. She was wearing girls clothes even as a toddler, before her adoption, did everything as a girl, never was anyone else. She gained her peace back by fully becoming Cilla, embracing who she'd always been, honouring divine knowledge from within.

She Loves seeing younger people grow up in a time where there is more knowledge about transness, in a time when they can come out for it and find places that stimulate this need. Seeing kids go to school as their true selves, being accepted by classmates, she wishes she could have experienced it but is impressed and Grateful to see it happen regardless.

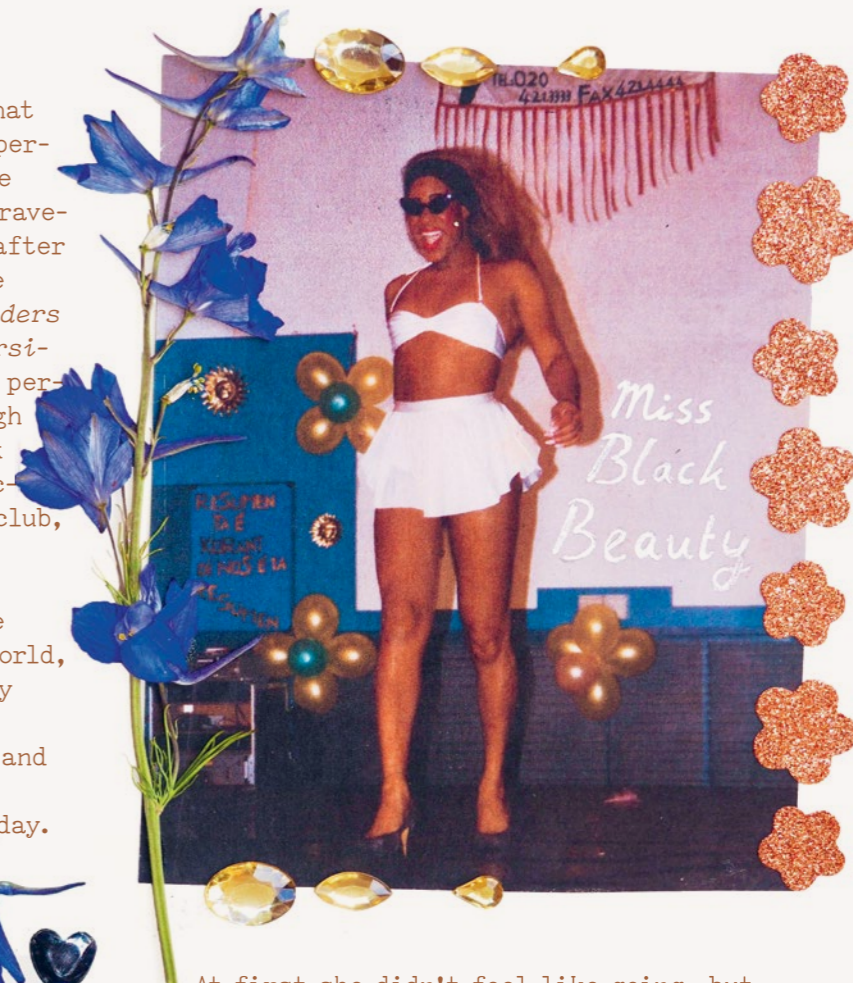
anne krul told me that for a long time Priscilla was a sort of educator for the young queer and trans people that were coming into Strange Fruit. She not only led by example by living as her true self, but she would also invite people over to play with clothes and makeup, welcoming them to embrace parts of themselves that weren't accepted in the wider society.

- 35 Venusia - The Black Trans Woman's Body is A Subversive Text (2025)

- 36 Saidiya Hartman - Wayward Lives Beautiful Experiments (2017)

Her own Memories of the time with Strange Fruit are mainly the performance shows that she saw or created, such as the time she performed together with her friend Ali at the Homomonument in amsterdam or when they traveled to berlin for the first Love Parade, after the wall had just fallen. Her performance practice *archives her resilience and renders visible her survival in the face of adversity*<sup>35</sup>. She knows of the power of music and performance, how it can transport you through portals into other worlds. She looks back at these times with a lot of joy, reminiscing over all the nights going out to the club, the cafe evenings, the drugs.

Priscilla truly is a lifelong performance artist, she has done shows all over the world, she's adored for her presence and won many competitions. Like the one time when her friend Kenneth called her up last minute and told her she should take part in the Miss Black Beauty pageant happening the same day.



At first she didn't feel like going, but some convincing made her leave her home. Where the other beautiful divas, dolls and drag queens had on expensive garments, swarovski crystals and professional makeup - Cilla took home another crown, winning with a minimal beat and a dress made by her own mother. It is beauty-filled spaces like these that make you understand on a deeper level, *that beauty is not a luxury; rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical art of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given.*<sup>36</sup>

For quite some years of her life Priscilla worked in the red light district, behind the windows in the *Oudezijds Voorburgwal*. She used an ensemble of incense and Florida water to protect herself from evil, uttering Prayers and evocations throughout her shifts. She experimented with her looks to find out what worked well, would switch up her hair often, changing from blonde to red to bald, sometimes making her pubic hair match. She was one of few black transgender women, often



37 Jessica de Abreu – Archiving the Superpowers of Black Sex Workers, from: Open Archief (2024)

the only that spoke dutch, so she received a lot of attention and learned how to turn her beauty and allure into a well earning business. She was often compared to *Blaka Lola*, the first black sex worker in *De Wallen*. They both have a clear *understanding of how a political power play on their bodies can be turned into their own gain.*<sup>37</sup> She takes massive pride in the comparison and named her cat Lola in her honour.

She lives with the knowledge that her intelligence, creativity and beauty sustain her, bring her pleasures unparalleled by any man and allow her to step into worlds deemed unreachable for many. Tokyo, Paris, Istanbul, Paramaribo, all around the world – possibilities unfold themselves at her feet. She knows the taste of sweet Freedoms on stages, in clubs and on the streets. The necessity of beauty, of constructing new worlds on her own terms. A new shape of safety found in her self asserted, yet naturally given, femininities. *The beauty that resides in and animates the determination to*

38 Saidiya Hartman – *Wayward Lives Beautiful Experiments* (2017)  
 39 Gianmaria Colpani, Wigbertson Julian Isenia, and Naomie Pieter – Archiving queer of colour politics in the Netherlands (2019)

*live free.*<sup>38</sup> She attempts new life time and time again, never letting herself be stopped by other peoples ideas of what is (im)possible. Her beauty not something she could ever lose, as it is embedded in her every being, outside and within.

Recently she has been stepping into a new kind of visibility, sharing her story in ways that feel fit for her. She was invited to contribute to a recipe book, was interviewed by her neighbourhood newspaper and shared about her past openly in both occasions. She also uploaded videos of her performances to her YouTube account, *CillaFilms* – taking her story into her own hands. As Andre Reeder said; *the only ones who can take care and write our history are ourselves. It is as simple as that. It serves the consciousness of ourselves in our struggle, and it should serve as a tool for directing our actions for progress.*<sup>39</sup>



# Beyond

40 Venusia - The Black Trans Woman's Body is A Subversive Text (2025)  
41 M. Bailey - Butch Queens Up In Pumps (2013)

During this search for resemblance i spent weeks scouring through delpher.nl, a website where millions of dutch newspapers are archived. This archive taught me that the Ballroom scene found its way to amsterdam as early as 1989.

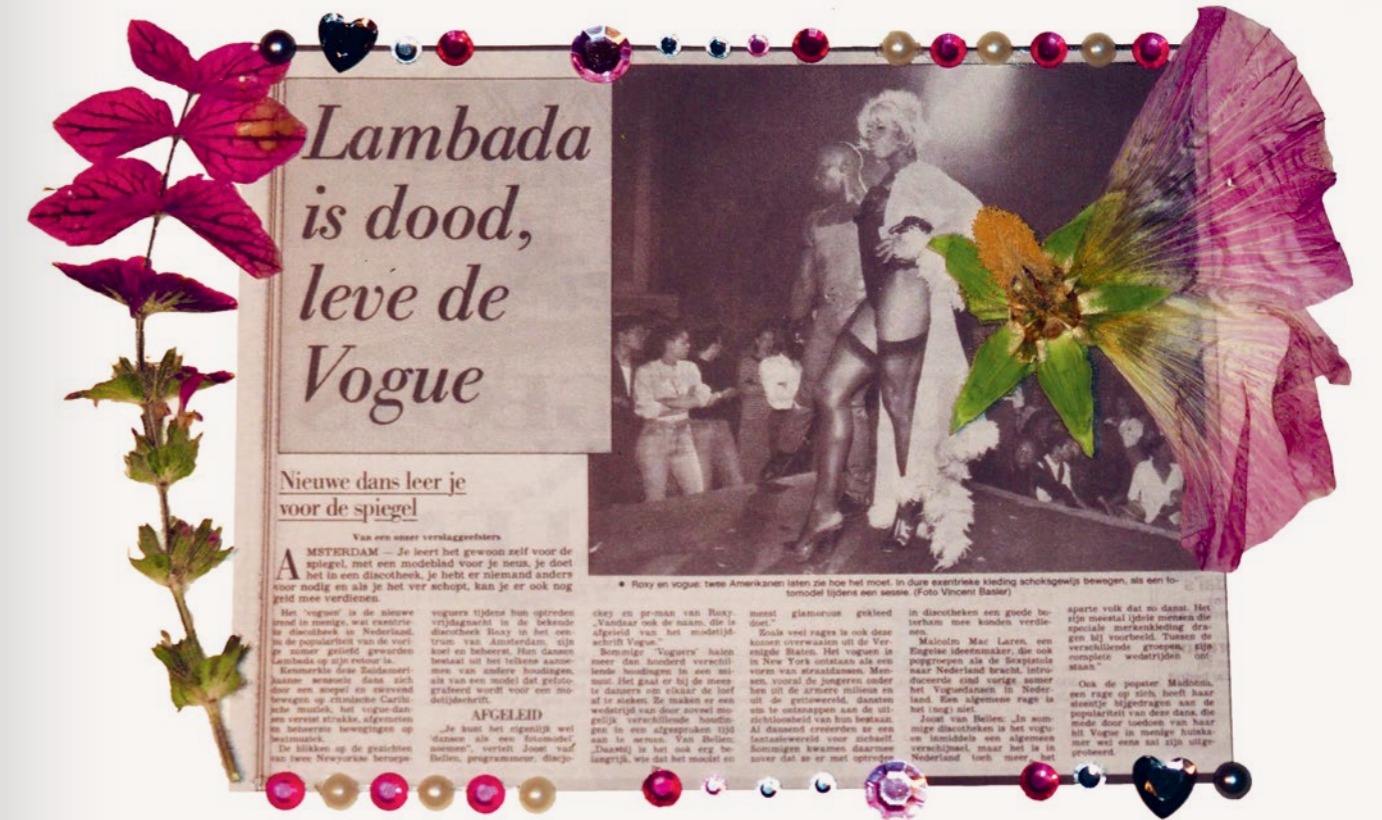
In 2025, James Major and Miila Angels hosted a Know Your History panel talk where they invited three different generations of Ballroom - one of them being Charl Landvreugd, one of the first Voguers in the netherlands, who had been active in the amsterdam Vogue scene at its inception. He shared how at the time Malcolm McLaren's Deep in Vogue was playing on MTV multiple times a day and he and his friends were glued to the screen, paying intent attention in order to copy the movements, wait for 9 hours until the same clip shows up, copy the movements again and again and again. No money for VCRs, just patience and attention.

He shared how voguing for a long time consisted of emulations of whiteness. Learning poses from magazines, showing that you can be as fab as the white girl on the cover. Categories were often tapping into rich and white tastes, but thankfully at one point the desire to model black aesthetics was embraced. Real change happened, real shifts happened.

The unattainable dreams of whiteness, turned into embracing the possibility of celebrating the self. Changing fates, a new revolutionary potentiality.

Charl and his friends had never seen anything like it, the first time they saw people that looked like them, who celebrated all that they were. Could be. They were not ridiculed, condemned or murdered. Butch and Femme Queens on screen; black, brown, queer and trans people that looked fabulous, spectacular, magical. Voguing. And Voguing truly is truly a deeply spiritual, other-worldly phenomenon. *Black trans women of the 90s fought hard to express themselves freely and innovated a dance vernacular that became foundational for the generations of young trans women succeeding them and further, that's emulated, appropriated and re-enacted globally today.*<sup>40</sup>

Ballroom in the united states had grown into an entire underground subculture, a system of supportive kinship networks, performative communal spaces, and interventions against the spread of HIV<sup>41</sup>. But there was no such thing as Ballroom in the netherlands yet, no categories, just a bunch of teenagers learning how to Vogue the Old Way from music videos and





bringing their moves into the club. They were voguing in gay clubs at a time when these spaces were 99.99.99% white.

There was such a small crowd of black and brown, queer and trans people, barely any spaces where they could come together in big groups to celebrate their existence. When these kids were in the gay white club, Voguing down, which was seen as a very feminine thing to do, it made them even less desirable to most. They were trying to live freely and had to realise that *not everyone goes out for*

*freedom. Some people, perhaps even most people, go out for spectacle, to be it or to find it, and to hold those of us freedom seekers hostage. Some people don't want to get free.*<sup>42</sup>

They would sometimes Vogue during dance battles, most often going up against B-boys. In the majority non white, but predominantly cisheterosexual hiphop scene the Ballroom kids felt they were seen as a queer cousin, sometimes tolerated – but often seen as too different, colourful and extravagant to fit in or be embraced. Yet they continuously decided

- 42 Zora Jade Khiry – Unspooled (2023)
- 43 Zora Jade Khiry – Unspooled (2023)
- 44 Johnny Pitts – Afropean: Notes from Black Europe (2019)

to take on the ostracisation and violence from the hegemonic groups – because Voguing was something that was so close to the imagined realities of what they could be. It was so very worth doing; following this urge for something beautiful that looks like you, comes from your lineage – rather than attempting to find acceptance in a larger group.

The Deep in Vogue music video was followed by the documentary Paris Is Burning, which was screening all over the netherlands for years. Then Madonna's Vogue hit the charts and everyone suddenly wanted to Vogue. White people had given their stamp of approval, which meant that this small group of Charl and his friends quickly stepped into opportunities.

Voguing had been chosen as the new craze and amsterdam wanted to be aflame. From '89 til '92 there was money to be made, and these kids would often have 3-4 bookings a night, being driven around from amsterdam to groningen to paris and back again. This was at a time when the doors to queer venues were closed. You had to ring the bell, someone would open a little window, see who was there, see if you could be let in. And all the kids were hearing everywhere; if you have sex, you die. AIDS was taking away the lives of so many, so quickly. So to be able to perform and celebrate their blackness, queerness and transness on stages all over europe was a very special thing.

In the Know Your History panel talk, Charl made sure to highlight the fact that all the Freedoms and opportunities many queer people in the netherlands are experiencing now, were not there at the time. All the relative ease, was not as common as it seems. It is not awarded to everybody and can be taken away at any time. But *the pursuit of freedom, however temporary, is always worth the violence of its theft*<sup>43</sup>. He reminded us of the importance of contributing to the cause, of making sure we take care of our siblings. To share our wealth, privilege, everything you have. We have to honour the legacies and refuse to let the space be taken away, as *europe kills by assimilation*<sup>44</sup>.

At the height of the hype in europe, a few american Ballroom Icons were flown out to teach classes, show their skills and walk the

- 45 Administrative Staff – Heart Island Burial Records (2023)
- 46 Jason Okundaye – Revolutionary Acts: Love and Brotherhood in Black Gay Britain (2024)
- 47 Emmett Harsin Drager – Looking After Mrs. G: Approaches and Methods for Reading Transsexual Clinical Case Files, from: Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies (2022)



Balls. One of these Stars was Fidel Fields Couvertier, a baby Butch Queen from Harlem. Dutch newspapers called him one of the best Voguers of america. He taught classes in many different places in the country; koog aan de zaan, rotterdam, utrecht, amsterdam. He performed in the RoXY multiple evenings, made love on stage to a windmachine.

Fidel died of AIDS in 1992 and was buried in the mass burial site Hart Island in New York. *He was buried against the family's wishes before they were even given a chance to claim his body. He went under several possible pseudonyms as he was a ballroom performer in the queer club scene. He was a young black gay man who died prematurely and allegedly without any identification on him. Unfortunately the city does not have the best history of keeping track of or respecting the bodies of young black gay men.*<sup>45</sup> He was too young. I know he had more dreams to realise, more places to see in the world. He was robbed. Robbed of life. *When great men die young, the best we can do for them, to continue the battles they fought, is to name and remember them and ensure that they are not buried quietly.*<sup>46</sup> I managed to upload the photographs I found onto the Hart Island memorial website. His name written in, remembered. His presence immortalised. His legacy lives on in the Memory, as well as in this digital archive.

But *Archives obscure. They produce stories that may or may not capture what actually happened*<sup>47</sup>, I wonder of the emotions that ex-

- 48 Janet Mock - Redefining Realness (2014)
- 49 Jackie Kay - Trumpet (1998)
- 50 Brad Walrond - Every Where Alien (2024)

ist far outside of the documented archival material. The feelings he felt during gatherings in living rooms, walks to the Ball, utterances at the judges table. Walking into the club, an arrival at the right place, right time. Knowing that outside there was nothing but pain, there was nothing but beauty. Pain and beauty coexisting on the dancefloor, *in this swaying mass, no one's past mattered. Every person's only requisite was to keep moving*<sup>48</sup>.

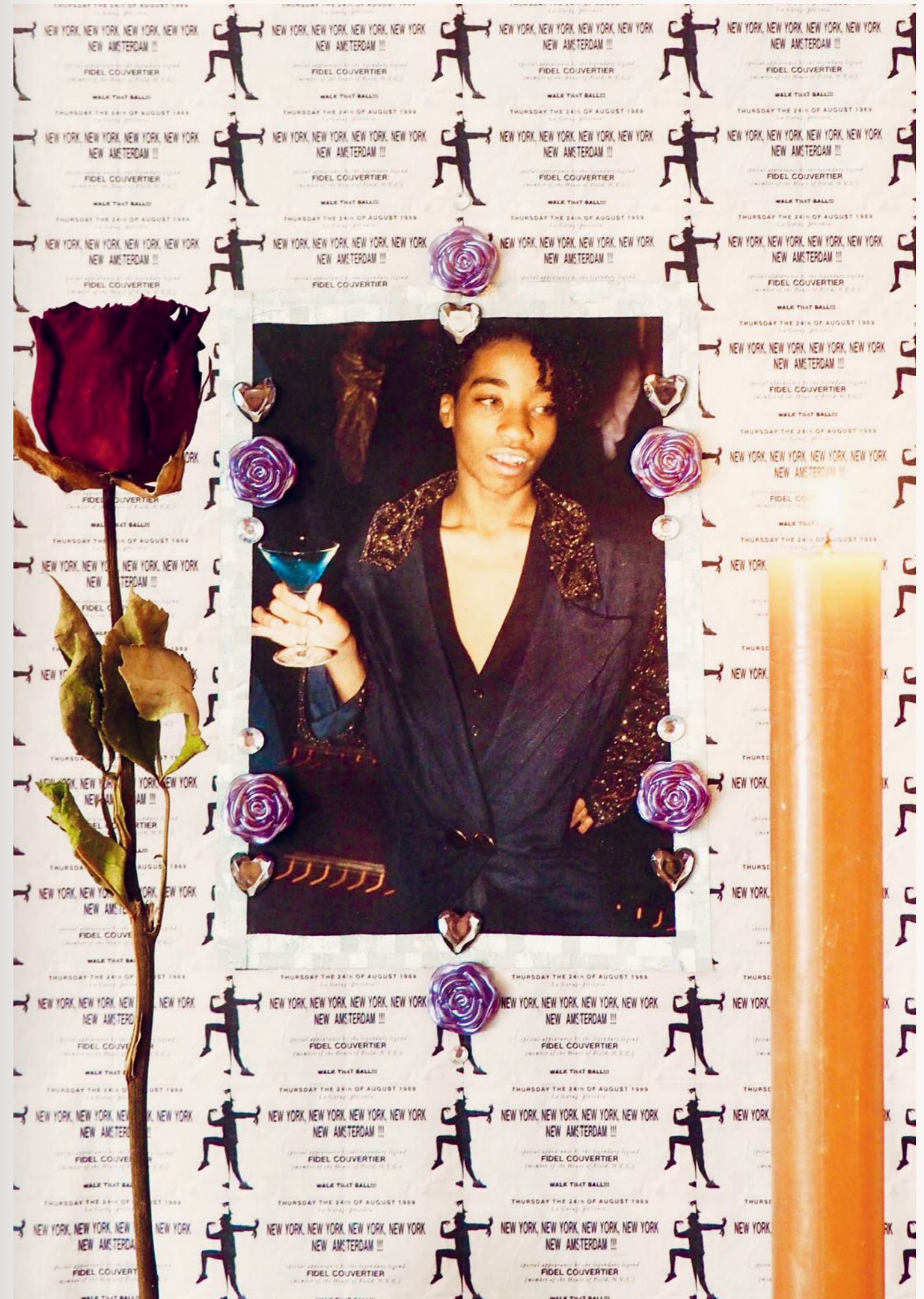
Moving into another never ending night filled with glitter and bass, while the children learn what it means to get used to expecting death. Latex, leather, lessons in safe sex and sexual health. *There is no tomorrow. There is just the minute, the second, the dip. The heat and the sweat. That feeling of being your body. Body and soul.*<sup>49</sup> People managing to find sobriety just to walk the Ball, realising Dreams by being deemed the most Real. *Boys and girls born too fluid for homes need Houses.*<sup>50</sup> A House with a mother and/or father that teaches them how to live how to love how to lie how to stay alive how to be hopeful how to grieve how to win trophies. Pioneers, Legends, Icons, Stars, Statements, many forced into being a Revolutionary. I Pray they found Peace in the Spirit realm.

- 51 Jason Okundaye - Revolutionary Acts: Love and Brotherhood in Black Gay Britain (2024)
- 52 Saidiya Hartman - Wayward Lives Beautiful Experiments (2017)
- 53 Niven Govinden - This Brutal House (2019)

Ballroom is a necessity for so many, a refuge, an escape, a sanctuary, not just a night out - it is a ceremony where you're supposed to listen to the MC it's a magical space that can leave you intoxicated. A place where you can train yourself in having the audacity and where you get awarded for a beauty that is seen as demonic in too many streets. A space filled with anointed tongues, mystic moves. *The altar of nightlife has for decades provided faith that good times and dances might last for ever, that outside's hostility need not lead to the end of life.*<sup>51</sup>

We give Thanks on a dance floor made out of nowhere. The DJ our Preacher, leading Prayer, with the master of the Ceremony sharing their dreams. Movement works. *An arrangement of the body to elude capture, an effort to make the uninhabitable liveable. On the dance floor it was clear that existence was not only a struggle, but a beautiful experiment too. It was an inquiry about how to live when the future was foreclosed.*<sup>52</sup> I Pop Dip and Spin my way into new understandings. *Category is: voguing is like communing with the spirits realness.*<sup>53</sup>

I Thank them for letting me hold my body into new forms of reMemory.





# In spite of

54 Kokoroko & KeiyaA - We Give Thanks (2023)

There are many questions that arise for me as i'm working with archival materials that show the innermost personal, vulnerable aspects of peoples lives;

- ☉ Do you want to be remembered?
- ☉ Did you evade the archives on purpose?
- ☉ Do you want to stay underground?
- ☉ Do you want your story public?
- ☉ What can i wake up?
- ☉ What should i let rest?
- ☉ Do you have a desire to be honoured?
- ☉ Can i be the one to worship you?
- ☉ *Don't you know i Love you...?*  
*Each and every one of you...<sup>54</sup>*

In the cases where i can't ask the person directly, i tend to follow my intuition and often ask Spirit for guidance through divination, seeing signs and listening to my dreams. In my conversation with Frank Wijdenbosch i learned that i'm not alone in this way of working. Frank is a Paramaribo born, amsterdam based, trailblazing theatre maker, community worker, performance artist and (ex) drag queen. He told me that spirituality is something that has always existed in his work and in his being.

He often performed women's roles on stage, impersonating women that have passed away. He would always take the time to tell these women that he respects them, Thank them - and pose the question if it is okay that he honours their stories by way of performance. He tells them that he will never put them in a bad light, shame them or disgrace their lives. They have suffered enough and all he ever wants to do is uplift them.

Frank Wijdenbosch had an alter ego named Fatzy Smith, inspired by blues singer Bessie Smith. His adoration for big, black, female jazz musicians was given to him by his mother, who encouraged him to listen to artists such as Sarah Vaughan and Billie Holiday. He would repeat cassette tapes over and over again in order to understand their voices, intonations and their breathing patterns. This intent study made him an expert at the craft of lip syncing and impersonation. His performance journey found its base in the gay scene, per-

forming at clubs like DOK, where Frank and his communities would show up and give each other the right to exist.

I met Frank in 2025 at the 45 year celebration event for the organisation SUHO (Surinamese Homosexuals), where him and Lionel Jokhoe were invited by ILHIA to share about their experiences. During the audience Q&A there was a question asked by Ali, an old member of Strange Fruit. He asked why Frank never spoke about the fact that in the 1980s he had his own tv show, if he was just being modest or if there was another reason? Frank then explained that he indeed had his own show called Fatzy & co, showing on VPRO - but that it wasn't the greatest experience. He felt





that partially he couldn't be proud of the show because his family did not see it as a 'real job', they were happier when he started working at the post office. Another reason is because he came in young and quite inexperienced, and quickly had to learn hard lessons about trust and ownership.

The Fatzy & co shows were well received, so when the six shows were done showing he had gained quite a renowned status. He figured he could now go and perform in his own shows, but what he didn't know then was that the VPRO had tried to claim his name; Fatzy & co, for themselves. Thankfully Frank had a good lawyer and was able to reclaim his own creation, but he almost lost his name to a national institution. He used this story to warn others to be careful with what you're doing, what kind of contracts you're signing and who is making money off of you.

His story is not the first or only of its kind, where institutions or individuals take advantage of up and coming artists, especially of artists that have been pushed to the margins. A lot of people do not come from a place of honour, reverence and respect when collaborating or hiring people, too often they just care about the numbers and money. The inability to be proud of your creations because it was claimed by someone else is a real thing. The fact that Frank went through this almost 40 years ago and is able to warn upcoming

artists now to tread carefully, shows the importance of intergenerational conversations. There is so much to learn when it comes to questions of honouring, preserving, archiving and not giving up after setbacks.

Frank shared about how there is so much wisdom and experience that has been taken away by the AIDS epidemic. Many of his colleagues in the performance industry were trans women and sex workers, the vast majority of them have been taken by the virus.

With so few of his peers still alive, he realised that his story is an important one. He now sees the beauty in sharing his experiences with younger generations - so that we can learn from them. Frank Wijdenbosch says himself that he acknowledges that his generation made the way for those of us who came after, yet also says that he's not a fighter, as he wasn't on the barricades - but i personally believe that his ways of existing are a Revolutionary act.



55 Frank Wijdenbosch – 'Zwarte Lola' was meer dan rareiteit, from: De Telegraaf, translation mine (2024)



After struggles with health, finances and losing communities, Frank still continues to create, and he always continues to honour women in his artistic practice.

One of the women Frank Wijdenbosch honours with his art practice is Nicolina Charlotte Elise Geesink Sant, later known as *Tante Lientje*, *Zwarte Lola* or *Blaka Lola*. Tante Lientje was presumably the first black sex worker in the red light district of Amsterdam, working there from the 1940s until she no longer could. There are almost no material archives left of her existence, except for a very few photographs. Thankfully Frank was able to find some oral histories, immaterial Memories and filled in the gaps with his own knowledge in order to share her story. An embrace of critical fabulation and queer methodology.

Tante Lientje was born in born in Paramaribo, Suriname in 1909 and as a young orphaned girl she was brought to the Netherlands by a Dutch missionary family to work as a servant. She was treated horribly, had to sleep in the coal pen and was eventually put out on the street. She chose sex work as a form of survival and men from all over the country came to look at her. She was a true myth-maker. She fabricated

stories about her heritage, telling customers that she was a princess from Africa, putting little flames in front of her door, talking in an invented language – making up a new history for herself.

There were very few black people in the Netherlands at this time, so her presence was one that drew a lot of attention. There were many tales going around about her, which brought people to still their curiosity by visiting her themselves. She worked in the windows throughout the war years of the 1940s and managed to save entire families from starvation by way of her generosity; sharing the food stamps and money she made by working with anyone in need. *If she had been a white man, she would now be famous as a war hero.*<sup>55</sup>

As she got older and started suffering from dementia, she wasn't able to keep up her job as well as before. People started taking massive advantage of her kindness, taking more than she could ever give. She ended up in old people's home *De Flesseman* and from there she made her return to Suriname, where she spent her last years in old people's home Albertine. She died there and was buried in a nameless grave.

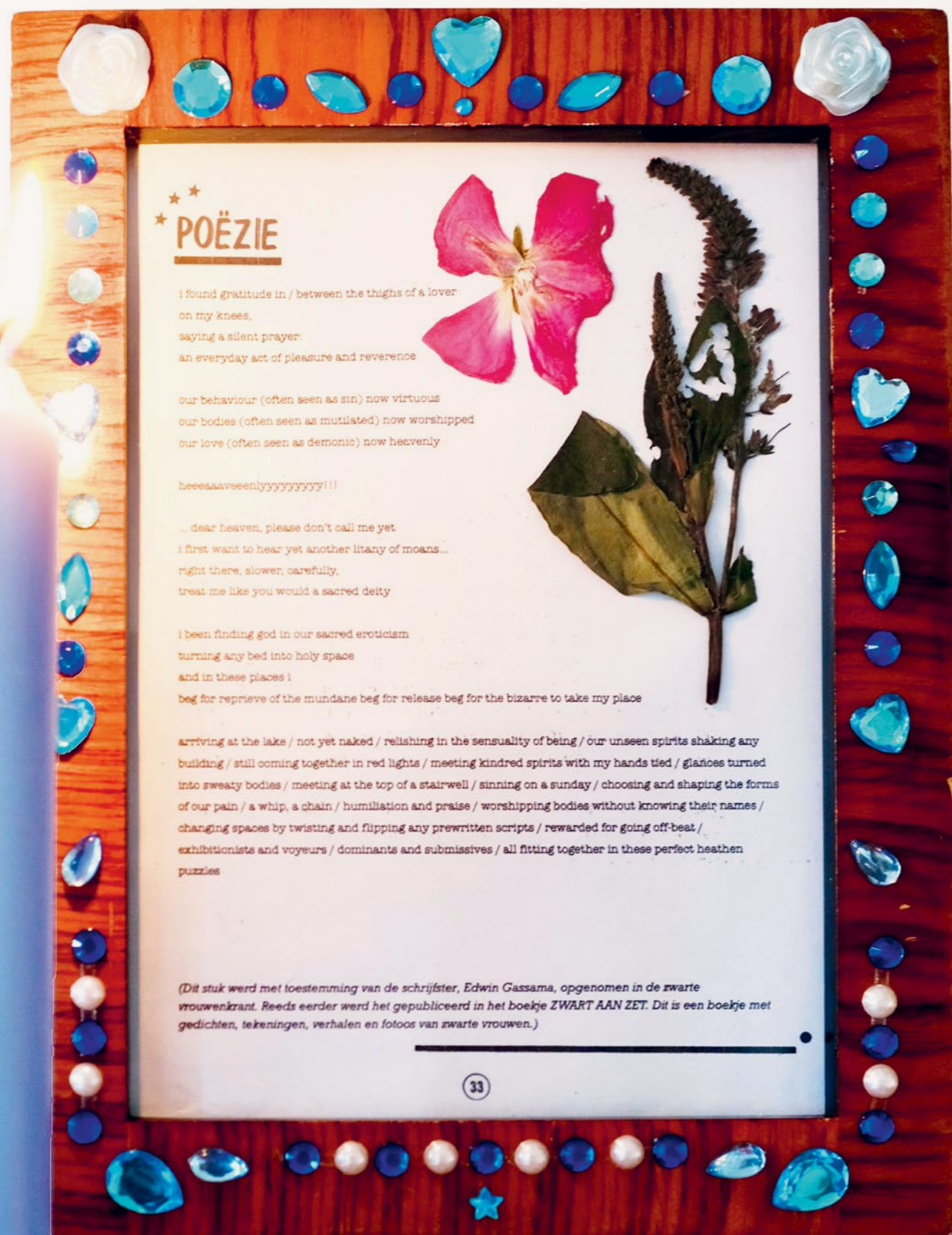
Even though she did not gain widespread celebration, many people have been honouring her legacy; squatters calling their building *Lola's Liefde*, Priscilla naming her beloved cat after her, Frank with his theatre shows, his readings and by sharing her story on national TV and in newspapers. Next to that, Frank is fighting to get a plaque with her name on the place where she worked: *Stoofsteeg 9*. He already managed to organise a gravestone at Albertine that reads: *"Hier rust mevrouw Geesink Sant. Geboren 1909, overleden 1990"*.

Her life is being written back into the archive, after her story has been erased and forgotten by many. She is in many ways a Saint, having made a way for so many others and I pray that her story, legacy and lessons live on and on and on for many days.



# Around

- 56 Kara Keeling - Looking for M-: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility and Poetry from the Future (2009)
- 57 Ntozake Shange - Bocas, from: A Daughter's Geography (1983)



★ ★  
★ **POËZIE**

I found gratitude in / between the thighs of a lover  
on my knees,  
saying a silent prayer:  
an everyday act of pleasure and reverence

our behaviour (often seen as sin) now virtuous  
our bodies (often seen as mutilated) now worshipped  
our love (often seen as demonic) now heavenly

heeeaaaveeenlyyyyyyyyyy!!!

... dear heaven, please don't call me yet  
I first want to hear yet another litany of moans...  
right there, slower, carefully,  
treat me like you would a sacred deity

I been finding god in our sacred eroticism  
turning any bed into holy space  
and in these places I  
beg for reprieve of the mundane beg for release beg for the bizarre to take my place

arriving at the lake / not yet naked / relishing in the sensuality of being / our unseen spirits shaking any  
building / still coming together in red lights / meeting kindred spirits with my hands tied / glances turned  
into sweaty bodies / meeting at the top of a stairwell / sinning on a sunday / choosing and shaping the forms  
of our pain / a whip, a chain / humiliation and praise / worshipping bodies without knowing their names /  
changing spaces by twisting and flipping any prewritten scripts / rewarded for going off-beat /  
exhibitionists and voyeurs / dominants and submissives / all fitting together in these perfect heathen  
puzzles

(Dit stuk werd met toestemming van de schrijfster, Edwin Gassama, opgenomen in de zwarte vrouwenkrant. Reeds eerder werd het gepubliceerd in het boekje ZWART AAN ZET. Dit is een boekje met gedichten, tekeningen, verhalen en foto's van zwarte vrouwen.)

Just Like Saint Lientje and Priscilla, Edwin Gassama's life evaded much of the dominant archives. They are not to be found on Instagram, Facebook, Google, or the like. I couldn't find them easily in the archives of ILHIA, IISH, S&V or Atria. I found them in their own records, on their own terms.

Edwin lived off government benefits for most of her life, spending the majority of her time writing. It seems that she didn't enjoy getting her photo taken, as the very few images in her archive are of other people, but she left documentation of so much life lived in letters, poems and boxes full of books with daily journal entries, spanning from 1962 to 1995. Carefully labeled, everything dated.

After I was gifted access to Edwin's archival material, I was originally wondering if this could even be something to be made public, as it's possible that she stayed out of public archives for a reason. I continued reading the diaries and stumbled upon multiple entries where Edwin wrote towards an imagined audience, pre-empting the idea that people in a future would read her words. This allowed me to continue *looking after*<sup>56</sup> Edwin.

Sometimes an entry would be detailed with names, locations, exact times and dates - whirlwinds of stories penned over hours long writing sessions, leaving no gaps. Other entries would consist of incoherent sentences, keywords, questions... leaving so much unanswered, so many curiosities awakened by my imagination. Too often too, Edwin's handwriting would be unreadable to me, words seemingly written down in darkness, drunkenness or unstable states. Still these journals are a fountain of knowledge and experience, that I am so glad I get to learn from.

Edwin loved to read, never hurried, believed in true anarchy and had beat up the police. She saw true peace as; sovereignty to all, for the land and all those underneath. She desired a worldwide Freedom; from her hometown Rotterdam to her father's home in Touba, Guinea. Freedom from West-Papua to Ayiti, from New York to Kashmir, from Goma to Kanaky. From the river to the sea. *We cannot speak the same language / but we fight the same old men*<sup>57</sup>, so from the house she lived in - to the food bank down the street, she envisioned world peace and took the steps she deemed necessary. She knew not to place Freedom within linguistic chains and instead focused on making changes in her day to day.

Edwin explained his presentation as illegible and ever-changing, he created a necessary fluidity and autonomy in order to fit himself into small enclosures and wide open fields. He took T and had had top surgery in Germany in order to feel more at ease in his body, but knew how to portray a kind of femininity when desired or needed. His self-made androgyny a site of radical possibility. He became what the world had said he could never be. His body a sovereign state within fortress Europe. Giving birth to himself over and over again, constantly transcending old manifestations of self. Edwin was initiated into new bodies by the medicine and surgery - as well as through his many Prayers and spells, seemingly not caring if others would understand.

Something I learned from his archives is that Edwin truly desired to live as if we are all already Free, refusing any normative narrative scripted by the world. He wrote about often taking trips to a lake, colloquially called *Liefdes Meer* [Love Lake], in order for

een nacht was het. Ik maak zo veel mee, ik zou het met de hele wereld willen delen. Hoop dat dit op een dag, op de een of andere manier mogelijk zal worden. De avond begon  
veel te... Annelies... i...

58 Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas - Wild Thing Wisdom (2021)

his body to be Loved upon. He let himself be surprised, took on new forms and roles. The fear of being caught made him move differently than inside a home. Quiet, tender touches with all his clothes on in the daytime. Naked, fast and short encounters in the dark. He often showed up to cruise alone, but sometimes brought his Lovers along. Lovers of all shapes and sizes with one thing they all had in common: living as a wayward wild thing. Wild things that longed for space without master or police, knew babylon as the enemy, the prison as obsolete and shared Edwin's dreams of Liberation and anarchy.

These Wild Things *reject Man and the master's house, and discover what it means to be ungovernable in their own unique way.*<sup>58</sup> They came together to Dream and organise these Dreams into materiality. Such as the one day when Edwin stood up in the aisle of a plane, while the state tried to deport

his friend. The plane couldn't leave if there were people still standing up, so him and his friend got taken off and could both stay in the netherlands. Edwin was part of *aktie-komitee pro-gastarbeiders* [action committee pro-guest workers] and a regular volunteer at the community garden on the edge of the city, which grew crops just to hand them over to those in need. He squatted empty buildings and would shoplift and steal necessities from big corporations, to share them with his housemates. He wrote poetry and performed it at fundraisers for the people of Maluku, Namibia and Palestine. He protested at the prison, the municipality, the united states embassy and of course in the streets. He housed his friends, families and strangers. He led his communities through raves, remembrance ceremonies and Prayers. *The laws and social frameworks prevalent in the world are structures that some of us cannot help but spill out of, structures that some of us can-*



59 Melz Owusu - Undisciplined: Reclaiming the Right to Imagine (2024)

*not help but need to climb and escape from. To be queer, and to be trans, is to be in a space of fugitivity.*<sup>59</sup>

I am nowhere near done with going through Edwin's archive and already they taught me that through it all, you can stay alive. And then, if necessary - you can decide to die. Edwin lived with an HIV/AIDS diagnosis for over a decade and ended up killing himself before the disease could.

- 60 Ada M. Patterson, Ark Ramsay & Jovanté Anderson - Too Far Out: Queer Lives and Afterlives in the Carribean (2021)
- 61 Melz Owusu - Undisciplined: Reclaiming the Right to Imagine (2024)
- 62 Leslie Feinberg - Stone Butch Blues (1993)

I speak to them often when i Pray or Dream during the day, as death to me is not an end, it is a continuation, a portal, a renewal - dark matter changing shape. I see his death as *resistance or another kind of imaginative politics*,<sup>60</sup> I think he knew of *the beauty and possibility that may erupt in the wake of the endings*<sup>61</sup>. I hope she knew how much her archival material changed my life, how much pain she eased. I trust he knew the importance of keeping his own story. He did his part. *Ed dotted the i in her name with a little heart.*<sup>62</sup>

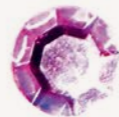
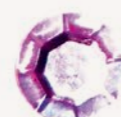




ALL I WANT TO KNOW  
FOR MY OWN PROTECTION  
IS ARE WE CAPABLE  
OF WHATEVER,  
WHENEVER ?



IF WE HAVE TO TAKE TOMORROW  
WITH OUR BLOOD  
ARE WE READY ?



# Outro

I was searching for mirrors, lessons, Freedoms and i found some. Been looking into eyes that show me i'm not the first, not the only, not the last with a desire to live like this; in pursuit of spaces without master, boss, landlord, police - with a deep Love of art and creation, of loving those who came before, honouring their efforts. I felt all these truths already but having met the people, seen their legacies outside of Dreams, it has been a true Blessing.

I give Thanks to the histories i pull strength from. I give Thanks to the shoulders i lean on. I give Thanks to those who continue to contribute to this fight. I give Thanks for this opportunity to write. I give Thanks to my literacy. I give Thanks to my body. I give Thanks to my reMemory. I give Thanks to those named. I give Thanks to those unnamed. I give Thanks to having a voice. I give Thanks to the many sources.

The archival material houses so much beauty, yet i see that the true treasures live in the Memories, connections and oral histories of the people that were there. The institutional archives need to be activated by asking questions, finding conversations, making new creations. Don't let these histories turn to dust in a folder / in a cabinet / in a hallway / on a floor / in an institution where no one truly cares about them. Don't let these Spirits go untended, unhonoured, unremembered. There is so much left to know, see, care about. I chose the stories that spoke to me the loudest, ones i was able to be in conversation with for these past six months. But there is so much more waiting for our attention, deserving of honour.

Even in these last days of writing, i have stumbled into and been sent materials beyond my imagination. Ghosts coming thru new Dreams, instagram dm's, whatsapp messages, books, speakers, screens. Charl sent me a photo of the Love Ball in the RoXY, anne told me that Jerry Haimé found multiple video and cassette tapes, an exhibition at the library showed me a magazine from 1985 called Transformatie, i finally watched What Ever Will Be, got access to see Glad To Be Gay by Andre Reeder and have yet to finish reading Edwins diaries. This publication was not a beginning into dutch black queer history and believe me when i say that this (re)search is not finished, i see too

many entries and possibilities. This here is truly just a tiny glimpse into a vast world of Memory - which has no ending(...). I hope that this publication shows you that survival and resistance are possible. That there is a beyond we can reach. That there are ways to fight against how the world is set up. That it does not have to be like this.

I was looking for answers but am honestly left with many questions. I am still on a journey of figuring out how to remember all the hurt that was necessary to sustain these beauty filled lives. How to remember the pains, suffering, deaths - without letting it swallow us whole? How to let anger at the state of the world guide us, not lead us astray?

But how can we not remember? How dare anyone forget? I want to dive deeper and deeper but at a certain depth the archives don't let me breathe. Because where can we tend to our grief? Where are our dead laid to rest? Where can we process the terror? Where do we heal from living in racist dutch society? When will we have full self determination? When will transsexuality not be seen as a disease? How can we live while there is the constant (threat of) poverty? Where do we heal from being raped, excommunicated or attacked in the streets? Where do we find release? When will we finally be free?

I have no answers, just many Prayers.

I Pray i Pray i Pray...

I Pray that the archives continue to guide us thru lessons from those who came before. I Pray that all Freedom fighters and survivors felt at times, what it means to be fully Free. I Pray they are Loved and supported by their communities and families. I Pray that their legacies live on in the lives of those here currently, those yet to be... I Pray we can all find the ability to Dream. I Pray we can find new ways of coming together. I Pray we can get more out of life. I Pray for future generations, may they find us and feel a reflection. I Pray that this mystical Revolution becomes reality. I Pray for fulfilled destinies. I Pray we learn how to get Free. I Pray for humanity. I Pray for Earth. I Pray for Nature. I Pray for entire galaxies. I Pray for eternal Peace,,,



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This publication is the outcome of the fourth iteration of the Open Archief project. Open Archief is a multifaceted, collaborative project where artists and heritage institutions come together to explore and create new possibilities and methodologies for creative reuse of archival material, and by doing so, reimagining the role of the archive and its users.

[www.openarchief.com](http://www.openarchief.com)



*The grief is ever present  
in the beauty of change<sup>63</sup>*

